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THE AWAKENING OF THE SOUTH AGAINST CHILD LABOR

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Two years ago, at the first annual meeting of this committee, I said, with reference to child labor in the South: "It is only necessary that the facts shall be carefully investigated and published, for the demand to become irresistible, from the people themselves, that an industry shall not be built upon the basis of child labor; nor will it be long before the will of a kind-hearted people shall be translated into humane laws, that we may again present a serene front to civilization."

Then followed a year of defeats to the child labor cause in the South, in North Carolina and Florida and Georgia and Mississippi and Louisiana, with no apparent advance, but rather a disastrous reaction, with the evil on the increase. But at the second annual meeting, with hope deferred but with faith unshaken, I said: "In spite of the ineffectiveness of present laws and the violation of solemn agreements (not to employ children under a specified age), and the utter absence of protective legislation in some of the states, I make bold to say, because I know my people and love my people, that the South is too kind-hearted to allow this sacrifice of her children."

And now it is a proud moment of my life, at this third annual meeting, when I can speak of the southern awakening against child labor as an accomplished fact. Our committee is able to report four splendid victories for our cause: in Maryland, where Dr. Lindsay's efficient aid has already been gratefully recognized by the friends of the children; in Kentucky, where Mr. Lovejoy's timely intervention, at a critical moment, reconciled conflicting views and secured the enactment of the best child labor law of any southern

state; in Louisiana, where the law was amended in the right direction; and in Georgia, where for the first time a child labor law has been enacted; the same legislature which had defeated what even the manufacturers called "a mild child labor bill," having passed at its second session, with but two dissenting votes in the House and unanimously in the Senate, a far more advanced bill, because that giant who rules America, who sometimes sleeps, but who once aroused is irresistible, had been awakened—Public Opinion. Nor is this all. The Democratic convention of Alabama, in nominating a prominent manufacturer for the office of governor, wrote child labor reform in no uncertain language into its party platform. From North Carolina and from Tennessee, from Florida and Mississippi and Louisiana and Texas, from the mother of states, old Virginia, and from the youngest daughter of the southern sisterhood, Oklahoma, there come cheering reports of an awakened public opinion, of an aroused public conscience; while in South Carolina the manufacturers are earnestly and sincerely pressing for the enactment of a compulsory education law which will help to solve the child labor problem. And at a meeting only this week in Kentucky, where the best brains and blood of the state were represented, among them the official of a powerful manufacturers' association, with representatives of the labor unions, a state committee of fifty was formed, with an associate membership that may be numbered by the hundreds, to amend and enforce the child labor law of Kentucky, and a message was sent from that gathering to Kentucky's representatives in the United States Senate to urge the passage of the child labor bills now pending in the National Congress.

This awakening of the South to its social problems is but a part of its awakening on every line of human progress. And there is with it all a new note of nationalism, sounding as clear as a bugle amidst the strife of partisan politics, the clash of selfish interests, and the dying groans of sectional prejudice, and that bugle note proclaims to willing ears, in the prophetic words of Ben Hill, of Georgia: "We are in the house of our fathers. Our brothers are our companions."

Forty years ago the South found itself with its labor system destroyed, its transportation system annihilated and the flower of its manhood under the sod. Its colleges which, while slightly fewer in number, yet employed more professors and matriculated more

students than the colleges of the rest of the nation, had their endowments swept away in the universal flood. A whole generation of students, who might have enriched the world with their contributions to literature and science, were following the plow to keep starvation from destroying what battle had spared. Nor was this all. There succeeded an era that was worse than the weary years of the war. The South had to endure not only the bitterness of defeat and the anguish of bereavement, but also the odium of having precipitated one of the costliest wars, in blood and treasure, that the world has known, and the additional odium of having been on the wrong side of the issue developed by the war, the perpetuation of human slavery. It, moreover, rested under the suspicion that its people did not accept the results of the war in good faith and could not be trusted to deal fairly with the ex-slaves. So the energies of the South, that might have been at once directed to its upbuilding, were employed in preserving the very life of our Caucasian civilization, the integrity of the race, and the maintaining of government against threatened anarchy. I believe the rehabilitation of the South during the decade after the war to be the proudest chapter in the history of the Anglo-Saxon race.

But during this decade the South became actually poorer than at the close of the war.

I am old enough to remember the bitterness of that poverty, and have learned to appreciate the heroism of the sacrifice that the fathers and mothers of the South made for the education and advancement of their children.

May I be pardoned for a word of personal reminiscence? I heard only this week in Washington a debate in the United States Senate over the District of Columbia child labor bill. One matter of grave discussion was the inquiry whether the little pages of the Senate would be deprived of the emoluments and advantages of their position during school hours by the terms of the bill. It had been agreed by the friends of the bill that such association was an education in itself. Then the Senate passed to the consideration of the widowed mother who had no other means of support than the labor of the immature child. And suddenly, to me, sitting there in the Senate gallery, there came the vision of my boyhood's home in old Virginia. We were "as poor as Job's old blue turkey-hen," as we used to say, and proud of it. It was at a time when it was

something of a disgrace to be rich, since that indicated that there had not been sufficient sacrifices for the Southern cause. I had been on a visit to Washington, where a prominent lawyer of the city had taken a fancy to the little boy, and, when I returned, a letter was sent offering me a position as a page in the Senate, with a salary that was then beyond the dreams of avarice. I never knew of the offer until it had been declined. I was just beginning to lay up my small store of Latin and Greek. A widowed mother had other ambitions for her son than the career in Washington offered before his education was finished. I do not know how hard the struggle may have been, but I do know what the decision was, and therefore I, this day, in this distinguished presence, with faltering voice and bowed head, do bless the memory of the sainted dead.

Let me say, in simple justice, that the awakening of the South was first of all an industrial awakening. The South had been able to maintain its cotton-growing monopoly. Its people had formerly turned from manufacturing to agriculture because of the conditions that accompanied slavery. Now they began to turn again to manufacturing. To-day it is difficult to exaggerate the extent of the advancement of the South along industrial lines. Last year the South manufactured more bales of cotton into yarn and cloth than all the mills of the rest of the nation. Birmingham has made Pittsburg sit up and take notice in the iron and steel works. The mineral resources of the South in coal and iron ore and petroleum are just beginning to be uncovered. The historic advice of Horace Greeley has been parodied to read, "Go South, young man, go South." But, lest this should read too much like a promoter's advertisement, consider finally the single fact that in the last two decades the cotton spindles of the South have increased from 667,000 to 9,500,000.

Then came the educational awakening. The most mortifying thing that can be brought to the attention of an intelligent Southerner to-day is the place of the Southern States in the illiteracy column. It is related of a North Carolinian, whose state had once been at the bottom of the list, that while visiting the Washington Library he glanced up at a wall-map with the states arranged according to the percentage of illiteracy, and, finding that his state no longer occupied the lowest place, he shouted, "Thank God for South Carolina." The story of this educational revival is familiar to all

in its more recent spectacular presentations, but the real history of the times is that of patient courage amidst great difficulties, the South steadfastly setting its face toward the education of two races, with a doubly expensive system on account of the necessary separation of the races in the public schools, and the two races being educated for the most part by the taxes paid by one.

And, now, with the increase of wealth, with a higher standard of wages and of living, with the school teachers going into all corners that the people may be taught, there has begun what I conceive to be the most significant movement of this generation, the application of the best minds of the South to the solution of those vital problems, to the advancement of those social reforms which are infinitely more important than the economic questions which have occupied so much of the thought of the nation, or the constitutional questions which have seemingly monopolized the theoretical statesmanship of the South. The interdependence of the business world throughout the nation was first established. Business men of all sections met upon the common platform of building up the business interests of the South. They discovered that we were one people before the preachers or the politicians had found it out. Then the educational leaders of the nation have been coming together in the series of southern conferences on education, and the North has found that it had something to learn from the South, while the South has been glad to gain from the experience of the North. The forming of a National Child Labor Committee marked an epoch in the development of this nation along the lines of social reform. The agitation had begun in the South, in Alabama, and the echoes of that battle for the children's rights was heard in Boston and awakened the New England conscience to the shame of having New England mill owners of southern mills, with good laws in their own states for the protection of the children, founding their industry in the South upon the basis of child labor. The fight progressed to victory in the passage of the first child labor laws of Alabama, North and South Carolina, and Virginia. Then it slowly grew upon the national consciousness that this was a national evil, that while the percentage of child laborers was greater in the South, the actual number of the little toilers was far greater in the North. And now no one speaks in a general way of this national curse with-

out coupling with the evil of child labor in the southern cotton mills that of the sweat-shops of New York, the glass factories of New Jersey, the coal mines of Pennsylvania.

But while the response of public opinion in the South to the appeal in behalf of the children, to the necessity of preserving with its wonted vigor the racial stock of the South, has been magnificent, it would be only a half truth to point that out without indicating also the defective and ineffective laws to which we have yet attained, and the long, slow, toilsome process by which those laws may be raised to the proper standard of effectiveness. The object of this reform is not to pass laws but to rescue the children from the mine and from the mill and to put them into the school.

Let us review briefly the present situation, first as to legislation, and then as to the number of children employed in one industry, which has been and still is the commanding industry of the South, but which may not long hold that position in the present general advance.

Except in Kentucky and Tennessee, the twelve-year standard yet obtains in the South. In South Carolina and in Georgia and in Alabama it is yet possible for a ten-year-old child, by permission of the law, to work twelve hours a day. There are sixty-six mills in North Carolina where twelve-year-old children may work a twelve-hour night, by law. The bald statement of these facts is a damning indictment. We have almost no machinery for the enforcement of the laws that we have, and their violation is a matter of common knowledge. Except in Kentucky and Maryland, we have no compulsory education laws in the South, though I regard it as a fallacy to say that we must put a child of tender years into the cotton mill, for instance, unless we can force him into the school. And the plea for compulsory education first has been made the instrument of sentencing thousands of little children to hard labor for no other crime than the supposed poverty of their parents, on the theory that little children, with no evil environments, from pure homes, be they ever so humble, must be forced to endure the long hours of the cotton mill, at constant employment, to keep them from becoming criminals. I resent that theory as a libel upon southern civilization.

Now, take a glance at the statistics. How many children, of

what ages, are now employed in southern cotton mills, nobody knows. The manufacturing organs that are inclined to boom the industry, as to capital invested, the sum of wages paid and the number of factories and spindles and looms, are apparently trying to convince the public that this vast industry is run with an insignificant body of human workers. The census bulletins of manufactures just issued for 1905 are far below, in the statistics of employees, the statements made by the same manufacturers, to the textile publications. And yet the percentage of children under sixteen reported by the manufacturers is enough almost to arouse a people to arms in their defense.

Yet the Bureau of Statistics and Information of Maryland reports that it has issued twice as many permits for children under sixteen at work as were reported by the manufacturers in the census bulletin of 1905. To ask a manufacturer, perhaps sensitive on the subject of employing children, perhaps afraid of incriminating himself, how many children under sixteen are employed in his establishment, is not the most scientific method of arriving at the truth. And yet when the census bureau compiles statistics gained in that way, the statement becomes an authority.

Fortunately for the cause of the children, a recent study of the population tables of 1900 gives the result of that house to house canvass, as to the number of children, ten to fifteen years of age, engaged in particular industries. From that we learn (census bulletin 69) that three out of ten operatives in southern cotton mills are from ten to fifteen years of age. This takes no account of a quite appreciable number of children under ten so employed.

An estimate of mine, published a year ago, that there were sixty thousand children under fourteen in the southern cotton mills has been widely challenged and abusively denied. The Blue Book, a recognized authority on textile statistics, corrected every year from the reports of the manufacturers, gives in actual numbers, or by fair computation from the few mills not reporting the number of their employees, the sum of 209,000 operatives in the cotton mills of the south. But three out of ten is thirty per cent, or 62,700 children from ten to fifteen years of age, to which two or three thousand should be added for children under ten years of age. It is my opinion that the percentage of children employed has increased since 1900 on account of the shortage of the labor supply and the

demand for more operatives caused by the increase of fifty-five per cent in the number of spindles since 1900. The figure given, 60,000 children under fourteen, is thus seen to be a conservative estimate.

I quote again the statement made by Mr. R. M. Miller, Jr., of Charlotte, N. C., formerly president of the Southern Cotton Spinners' Association, later president of the American Cotton Manufacturers' Association, considered an expert in cotton mill matters, that 75 per cent of the spinners of the North Carolina mills were fourteen years and under, while his predecessor in office, Mr. George B. Hiss, of Charlotte, told me that the usual calculation was that only 30 per cent of the operatives were adults.

Nor is this all. From the mines of Alabama and Tennessee and Virginia and Kentucky comes the cry of the children, some of them allowed to work by law at the age of twelve, some of them working contrary to the law at that age. From the woolen mills of Virginia and Tennessee comes the same bitter cry; from the cigar factories of Florida, from its canning factories; from the silk mills, from the phosphate mines, the children stretch out their feeble hands to us for help. Pity them? pity the children? Of course we do. But there is a more serious problem here. We are brought face to face with the fact that the depreciation of our racial stock has already begun, that we have a cotton mill type that can be recognized, that the percentage of illiteracy in the mill villages surpasses even that of the mountain counties of some of our states, and that there is already beginning, in a few factory centers, a moral collapse of which I hardly dare speak. And the South must face this more startling fact that its awakening has come too late, just as it came too late in England, to save a whole generation of its children. The South, with its traditions of states rights, must answer this question: Shall we, for the sake of one application of one constitutional theory, fail to ask the aid of our national government in securing an effective law and condemn a generation of our precious children that might be saved? I believe I know what the answer will be. We will build monuments to our fathers, but we will not cut ourselves among their tombs. Dead hands, long ago folded reverently and lovingly upon the breast, must not hold back the little children of the South from their rightful heritage. While the politicians may find an issue, the people,

whose hearts have ever beaten true, will have a word to say on this subject.

Believing in states rights, but also believing in the sacred rights of childhood, I would deplore the making of any such issue as shall put the rights of the state over against the rights of the child, because the child will win. The very stars in their courses are fighting for his rights, and the obituary of the Herods will be the epitaph on the tombs of dead politicians: "They are dead that sought the young child's life."

A moral revolution is sweeping over the nation, and the South is doing its part to swell the wave. After all, the south is a small part of the manufacturing life of the nation. We are as yet a rural people, loving the homely virtues of the soil. But it seems to me that the manufacturing and mining interests of the nation should take some recent warnings to heart.

When the President called the coal operators and the coal miners to a conference, which referred their differences to arbitration, public sentiment was divided as to the rights of the two parties to the contention. But when in the course of that investigation the fact was developed of the wholesale employment of boys in the mines, public sentiment instantly veered to the side of the miners.

Two years ago the business men of highest repute in this country were the insurance officials. A family quarrel in one of the insurance companies led to an investigation. That investigation proved the misuse of trust funds, the final result of which was the robbery of the children, orphaned by the death of the bread-winners; and now Alexander is in a madhouse, McCall is dead of a broken heart, the McCurdy's are banished, and all because in offending the public conscience the children were also touched.

Six months ago the trust question was a subject of academic discussion. Then one great trust was found to be poisoning the people with unwholesome meat, while others were convicted of adulterating food and drink and medicine and even the candy which the children craved. And now all are involved in indiscriminate condemnation, so that every time the department of justice begins a new prosecution the joyful people send a message of sympathy to the White House saying, "Hit 'em again."

The protective tariff is just now a matter of academic discus-

sion. This committee, as a committee, has nothing to do with it. I suppose that it embraces all shades of opinion on that subject. But let this discussion of a national child labor law become the burning question in Congress, let the manufacturers or the coal combinations oppose it there, let the discussion develop the real facts of child slavery, and it is easy to predict that those who claim the right of the exploitation of infant industry will have fatally damaged their claim for the protection of infant industries.

For this nation, of which the South is a loyal part, has set its face already as a flint against the oppression of childhood. It is not going to tolerate it one instant longer than it can be helped. And the danger always is, in a democracy, that when it has become passionately aroused it may be indiscriminate in its punishment. There is no power on earth like the appeal which helpless childhood makes. There is no vengeance like that of the lioness robbed of her whelps. And woe betide those who would stand in the way of this nation, once it has heard the piteous cry of the children, and is rushing to their defense and their salvation.